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The situation in the Middle East

Security Council
Seventy-third year

Identical letters dated 29 May 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to inform you that on 22 May 2018, an Israeli warplane violated Lebanese airspace and circled over the city of Beirut. The Israeli Government flaunted that violation by displaying photographs of the combat aircraft on 22 May 2018 at a conference of air force commanders held in Israel. The photographs were also published in the Israeli media (please find annexed a copy of an article in the *Haaretz* newspaper).

Lebanon strongly condemns this fresh violation of Lebanese airspace, which constitutes yet another flagrant violation of Lebanese sovereignty, the Charter of the United Nations, the provisions of international law, and international resolutions, in particular Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). Lebanon stresses that it will maintain its legitimate right to defend its sovereign territory, airspace and waters in the face of any Israeli attack. Lebanon calls upon the Security Council to condemn this hostile action in the strongest possible terms and take all measures needed to deter Israel from continuing to commit serious violations of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon by land, sea and air.

Lebanon will never cease to call upon the Security Council, and through the Council the international community, to apply the forceful pressure needed to make Israel halt is acts of aggression and comply with and implement fully and without delay all provisions of resolution 1701 (2006). The continued violation of Lebanese airspace, occupation of Lebanese territory and commission of acts of aggression by Israel constitute a blatant violation of international law and internationally authoritative resolutions, and threaten regional and international security and peace.

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 37, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Amal **Mudallali**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the identical letters dated 29 May 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

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Analysis // Iran, Israel and an F-35 Over Beirut: The Fine Line Between Deterrence and Hubris

Israel's publication of the dramatic photo of the F-35 above Lebanon had some embarrassing side effects

Amos Harel | May 28, 2018 5:50 AM

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A message of superiority: This is the Israeli army's photo of an F-35 over Beirut Credit: Israel Television News Company / Screenshot

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With U.S. President Donald Trump at its side and following a series of military gains in the north, Israel is zigzagging irresponsibly on the boundary between deterrence and arrogance. This behavior is not surprising when it comes to politicians. Certainly not in regard to Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz who, like a dyed-in-the-wool internet commenter, told the European Union this week to go to "a thousand thousand hells"; nor in regard to a number of MKs and journalists who have spoken of the events of recent weeks in terms of a divine miracle. What's more surprising is the way the Israel Defense Forces stumbled in its decision to publish a photograph of

an F-35 aircraft on an operational sortie, the first of its kind in the world, over Beirut.

One can understand, albeit barely, the considerations that led the Israel Air Force's commander, Maj. Gen. Amikam Norkin, to display the image at a meeting of commanders of foreign air forces that he hosted on Tuesday in Herzliya. Israel wants to show that the advanced warplane is already in use in operational missions. There is certainly a deterrent value to the sight of the plane above Beirut's international airport and over the city's Dahiya neighborhood, home to the city's Shi'ite population, during a heightened period of tension in the north. But it still comes off like inordinate swagger, and perhaps also an attempt to rehabilitate the IAF's image following the downing of an F-16 during the previous escalation of hostilities with Iran and Syria, in February.

>> Israel concerned about F-35 sale to Turkey, expects U.S. to withhold 'upgrade capabilities' ■ Russia considers pulling back Iranian forces from Israel-Syria border

The publication of the dramatic photo of the F-35, which, unsurprisingly, was the source of some patriotic gung-ho headlines in some newspapers, had some embarrassing side effects. The organizers of the Herzliya confab had asked the journalists present not to photograph the lectures. Norkin's remarks about the sophisticated aircraft, with the photograph blurred in the background, were disseminated to the media by the IDF Spokesperson's Unit. But the following evening, the military correspondent of Israel Television News, Nir Dvori, broadcast the photograph itself on the nightly news. The spokesperson's unit scrambled to issue a statement to the effect that the image shown by Dvori did not originate with the IDF and was not broadcast with its authorization. Where, then, does the line run between necessary deterrence and flagrant hubris, with its potentially tragic results? Probably the army itself doesn't even know.

The Americans are apparently less impressed by these large doses of self-confidence. After returning home from recent tours here, a few visitors from the United States, including New York Times

columnist Thomas L. Friedman (twice) and Sen. Lindsay Graham (Rep., South Carolina), have predicted a regional war between Israel and Iran. They were joined this week by Dennis Ross, a former senior official in the Clinton and Obama administrations. "The tinderbox that is the Middle East threatens to explode again," Ross wrote in a New York Daily News op-ed on May 20. He predicted a worsening of the situation soon and warned that, in the absence of a systematic policy, the United States is liable to get sucked into the whirlpool.

According to Ross, the limited Iranian operation against Israel on the day after Trump's announcement of the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear agreement, reflects Tehran's desire to avoid war at this time. "But no one should be misled," Ross wrote. "Israel and Iran are on a collision course at this point, it seems only a matter of time before such a war starts."

Extreme powers

Buoyed, perhaps, by the war atmosphere in the past month, or as a result of a surfeit of self-confidence amid the chain of achievements, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tripped up in the episode of the amendment to the Basic Law on the Government. The Knesset approved the amendment at the end of April, including a clause stipulating that under extreme circumstances the prime minister and the defense minister can decide by themselves to launch a war or a military operation.

The background to this was apparently the frustration, expressed by Netanyahu and by former Defense Minister Ehud Barak, over the decision-making process in regard to an attack on Iranian nuclear sites, between 2009 and 2013. Barak, who has since become seriously embroiled with Netanyahu, complained afterward that opposition to and reservations by security cabinet ministers, including Yuval Steinitz and Moshe Ya'alon, had been detrimental to developing plans to bomb Iran. In practice, considerable weight was attributed also to the opposition of the heads of all the security arms to the attack plan promoted by Netanyahu and Barak.

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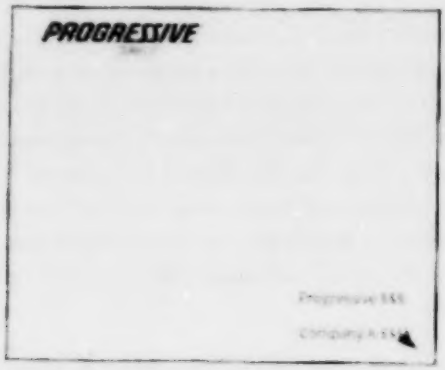

Is Netanyahu truly eager to arrogate to himself and to the defense minister powers that would also make him almost exclusively responsible should the war deteriorate into a disaster? It's not clear what he was thinking when he pushed the legislation forward initially – but this week he withdrew it. At its meeting on Wednesday night, the security cabinet decided to work to restore the original wording of the legislation, which would transfer the power to decide on a war from the full cabinet to the security cabinet, but without the clause concerning extreme circumstances.

The clause had earlier drawn criticism from Steinitz, Transportation Minister Yisrael Katz (Likud) and Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked (Habayit Hayehudi). Some former senior figures in the defense establishment also exerted pressure on the ministers, and Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot also questioned the implications of the amendment. According to MK Ofer Shelah (Yesh Atid), a member of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, who fought against adding the new clause, "Netanyahu's ploy was a danger in terms of both security and morality. It's a good thing that a few ministers grasped the scale of the danger and mobilized to put a halt to it."

Amos Harel
Haaretz Correspondent

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